

Written testimony of Kenneth Trosper, enrolled Northern Arapaho

Wind River Indian Reservation Wyoming

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I would like to thank the Honorable John Barrasso as well as the other members of the United States Senate Committee on Indian Affairs for allowing us to present our issues concerning the Wind River Irrigation Project

My name is Kenneth Trosper I serve on the Northern Arapaho side of the Wind River Water resource Control Board

I would like to offer my testimony on the shortfalls of the irrigation project and the BIA in protecting the natural resources of the Wind River watershed. The project diversions have to divert more water than is called for simply to push the required water down the canals. This is done because of the terrible condition of the entire system. There has been little conservation attempts or major rehab other then what the Water Board and Tribes secured funding for.

As a young man I listened as my grandmother Margret talked about happier times with my grandfather before the war. She told me of fishing the Little Wind and the great fishing the river provided. She talked of them sitting on the bank of their favorite fishing hole near Ethete and catching enough cutthroat trout to feed the whole family (as well as others) with nothing more than a willow pole, a hook and line, and some bait.

Today is a different story; the native Yellow Stone cutthroat has all but disappeared in the little Wind River. Cutthroat need cold, clean water which is something the lower Little Wind can no longer provide in the summer months due to the inefficacy of the Wind River irrigation project, as well as a lack of storage and conservation.

If this project was maintained as it should have been, upgraded as other projects are, provided conservation measures like other systems, perhaps then the Little Wind wouldn't be warm tepid bacteria laced stream in the summer but instead a clean, living river like the one my grandparents enjoyed.

Another area of concern related to the inefficiency of the irrigation project is that of the native sauger. Although sauger were once found in most of the major river basins in Wyoming, according to Craig Amadio (*Wind River watershed Sauger study*) the Wind River reservation supports one of the few remaining genetically-pure sauger populations in the Western U.S. and according to the study, the Wind River watershed population is estimated at only 4300 fish. A Wyoming Game and Fish State wildlife action plan lists the sauger as one of Wyoming's species of greatest conservation need.

This local population is threatened because of the bottleneck created by the sub agency diversion and low flows below the diversion in the summer months, there is also the chance of potential kill offs from flows insufficient to dilute any discharge or accidental contamination. The sauger is already lost above the diversion since it can no longer migrate past the diversion.

Along with the sauger above the diversion, a fresh water mussel, *Lampsilis siliquoidea* important to our native culture, once found all along the Little Wind is now only found miles below the sub agency diversion. The mussel uses the sauger to propagate and like the Sauger has disappeared above the Sub Agency diversion and is also threatened below.

The Wind River and Little Wind River would benefit greatly from instream flows. Within the Tribal Water Code, instream flow is listed as one of the fifteen beneficial uses. Not only would fish and wildlife benefit, but groundwater recharge, municipal and domestic water, as well as water quality. A healthy viable river benefits everyone; however without a full rehab of the system, conservation and future storage projects, it would be extremely difficult to maintain flows in the Little Wind to protect our fisheries, while providing current irrigation needs.

Kenneth Trosper